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Lucia A Keegan 08/07/2006 03:24:57 PM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 005289

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Israel - Hezbollah Combat  
Afghanistan  
PARIS - Friday, August 04, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Israel - Hezbollah Combat  
Afghanistan

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

"South Lebanon: A Scorched Earth" (Liberation) gives the tone of today's lead international story. Yesterday afternoon's Le Monde carries a front-page interview of Israeli PM Olmert who believes "France's objection to an international force can be overcome..." But as announced by Le Figaro on its front page: "General Ahoun does not want French soldiers in Lebanon," preferring instead "negotiations with Hezbollah... An international force will in fact be a force of occupation fighting Hezbollah. This is why the French do not want to participate... Such a presence would increase the risk s of a civil war in Lebanon..." Le Figaro's second front-page story on Lebanon is entitled: "Nasrallah Threatens Tel-Aviv" while

an inside report underscores France's isolation regarding negotiations with Syria, and French-American disagreements at the UN. (See Part C)

FR2 television reported that despite Nasralla's threat on Tel Aviv, PM Ehud Olert said he would not stop the fight, while TF1 focused on "the UN's helplessness to decide on a cease-fire." FR2 reported Condoleezza Rice's remarks that "an agreement could be found soon; the discussions are not over yet."

Le Parisien carries an interview with academic Jean-Paul Chagnollaude on his predictions for the Israeli-Lebanese conflict: "the U.S. holds the keys" to resolving the conflict because it is the only actor able to impose a ceasefire on Israel. Chagnollaude believes Israel's end goal of eradicating Hezbollah, a "popular movement in parts of the Arab world," is unlikely to be obtained soon. Israel is at fault, says Chagnollaude, for failing to attack solely Hezbollah. He urges France to continue its calls for an immediate ceasefire and a political accord at the UN: "The more time passes, the more we see it is the only viable solution."

La Croix leads with "Afghanistan, the Other Terrorist Front." One article examines intensified Taliban attacks: "They are making life hard for international coalition troops, as well as for Afghan forces." La Croix attributes the Taliban's successful recruitment of young Afghans to the "frustrations of the population" with the Hamid Karzai administration. The editorial calls for economic development in Afghanistan as a path to durable peace. (See Part C)

Liberation reports on the comments of the outgoing British Ambassador to Iraq about "a civil war brewing in Iraq" which "represents a denial of Blair's position," while Le Figaro quotes Ambassador Patey as saying that "Mahdi's militia must be kept from becoming a state within the state, like Hezbollah in Lebanon."

Le Parisien reports on "The White House's Plan" for a post-Castro Cuba. The article carries cautious overtones in response to U.S. calls for a democratic transition, citing American critics of the U.S. position and quotes Democratic political analyst David Sirota's warnings: "The Bush administration has fallen in the trap set by Castro." That trap is an appearance of the U.S.'s meddling "where it has no business," says Sirota. The article further notes the American press "recommends a lighter measure to facilitate the transition from dictatorship to democracy: abandoning the 'counterproductive' embargo."

Le Figaro carries an op-ed by Peter Mandelson, the EU Trade Commissioner, entitled "Europe Does Not Give UP on Doha." Mandelson believes that the cost of failure is such, that, "we are condemned to look to the future and go back to the drawing board. While the political dialogue appears stalled, it is imperative to set it back on track."

#### (C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Israel - Hezbollah Combat  
"After the Battle"

Pierre Haski in left-of-center Liberation (07/04): "The international community, if it can still be called that, is negotiating on the nature of the force while the strikes continue, and it remains incapable of imposing a ceasefire... The next phase could turn out to be a major trap for the international force which risks precipitating the shock between civilizations everyone has been afraid of... If the force looks like a replacement for Tsahal, it will become a target of the Lebanese resistance... Because of America's mired situation in Iraq and the latest setbacks in Afghanistan, there must be a very strict definition of the force's mission. While a ceasefire is of the essence, it is also of great import to prepare the aftermath of the military battle, so as not to have to pay dearly afterward."

"France Isolated in Its Boycott of Damascus"

Thierry Oberle in right-of-center Le Figaro (07/04): "The European demarche to dialogue with Syria is widening the gap between Paris and its European partners. France's overture towards Teheran and its persisting denial to involve Syria in the Lebanese crisis, as reiterated yesterday by FM Douste-Blazy, who fears that Syria's involvement might be used as exchange currency to whitewash Syria of

its responsibility in the assassination of Hariri is distancing France from the rest of the EU... Meanwhile the U.S. shares France's stance on Syria."

#### "Western Divergence Over Damascus and Tehran"

Natalie Nougayrede in left-of-center Le Monde (07/04): "France's isolation on how to approach the Middle East's latest crisis was once again brought to light with the Spanish FM's visit to Damascus... Meanwhile France has made repeated overtures towards Tehran... Syria's regime has been fingered by both Chirac and Bush for supporting Hezbollah and facilitating the transit of weapons coming from Iran. But the U.S. and France differ about Iran. Washington is sticking to its intransigent position. Still a French source acknowledges that 'involving Iran in the Lebanese crisis does represent the risk of having to give in on the nuclear crisis. Western capitals are aware that both Syria and Iran want to take advantage of the crisis.' A source in Jerusalem indicated that the initiative of a dialogue with Syria 'comes from the Americans and the Israelis' and added that 'Syria is a nation one can talk to, unlike Iran.'"

#### "Franco-American Disagreement at the UN"

Guillemette Faure in right-of-center Le Figaro (07/04): "Washington, rather than emphasizing its differences with Paris, is underscoring the points of convergence. The idea of two separate resolutions has resolved one set of issues opposing France and the U.S. Meanwhile the terminology about a ceasefire is still a bone of contention."

#### Afghanistan

##### "Objective: Development"

Francois Ernenwein in Catholic La Croix (07/04): "How can we transform military victories into lasting peace? In Iraq and in Afghanistan, the return of the Taliban and the battles which have ensued, illustrate that implementing democracy despite major commitments from the international community have not sufficed to bring civilian peace... By quickly taking over Kabul, Western forces put an end to a mad dictatorship. But the in depth transformation of Afghanistan's society is slow in coming. Afghanistan showed a more positive start than Iraq. But it will really be on the road to salvation if a true phase of economic development is implemented." STAPLETON